

# The Catfish Institute

## 2017 ANNUAL REPORT







Dear Friends:

As the catfish industry continues to rebound, 2017 saw an increase in sales and production. Supply of U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish, for the first time since 2013, was available to meet demand. Now the industry must work to increase sales and regain markets lost. By working to produce the product that the market demands while searching for ways to expand the product mix, sustainable growth can be achieved.

In the past, TCI has been successful in obtaining relief through USDA's various purchasing programs. To better communicate the needs of our farmers, TCI and CFA led a joint industry tour for USDA-AMS leadership this fall. In addition, as a result of these meetings, processors are now working to develop new and expanded product offerings to better compete within the revised USDA Buy American initiative.

The Catfish Institute is aggressively working to increase demand for our products, embarking on a comprehensive advertising campaign to connect our region's catfish growers to the end consumer. This was accomplished in a number of ways—perhaps most significantly through the new "Catfish is Life" video project, where catfish farmers and their families are highlighted in a series of passionate, and completely non-scripted, videos.

Television media played an increasingly important role this year, as the Alabama, Arkansas and Mississippi Catfish Farmers of the Year were featured in 30-second TV commercials, as well as on social media, radio and outdoor billboards. These farmers also represented our industry in Boston at Seafood Expo North America. We thank them for the role they play to help drive demand for our industry.

As you read this annual report, you will get a detailed glimpse of TCI's promotional campaigns conducted throughout 2017. The Catfish Institute greatly appreciates its member feed mills and farmers for their support. A very special thank you goes to the entire Board of Directors for their time sacrificed in providing leadership and guidance.

*Harry Simmons, Jr.*

Harry Simmons, Jr.  
Chairman, The Catfish Institute

*Roger E. Barlow*

Roger E. Barlow  
President, The Catfish Institute

# The Catfish Institute Member Feed Mills

Alabama Catfish Feed Mill, LLC  
Uniontown, Alabama

Delta Western  
Indianola, Mississippi

Fishbelt Feeds  
Moorhead, Mississippi

Top Water  
Wisner, Louisiana

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**Harry Simmons, Jr.**  
Fishbelt Feeds



*Vice-Chairman*  
**David Pearce**  
Alabama Catfish  
Feed Mill, LLC



*President*  
**Roger E. Barlow**  
The Catfish Institute



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Alabama Catfish  
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**Turner Arant**  
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*In 2017, The Catfish Institute began its fourth decade of advertising and promotional programs in support of the U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish industry. Through the pages of this report, we will offer a glimpse into the details of the many campaigns undertaken over the past year. We hope you will agree that our marketing programs remain innovative and successful, and are worthy of your continued support.*

### Catfish is Life

A new video project, known affectionately as “Catfish is Life,” was developed and produced by TCI this year. This video series is part of a multi-year project to provide consumers a behind the scenes look at where their catfish comes from—and the farms, families and communities responsible.

A total of 17 videos were completed by year’s end. All of them were honest, heartfelt and completely unscripted. They are timeless works of art, and we could not be prouder of our efforts. To view them, simply log on to our website, UScatfish.com.

The videos are hosted on our YouTube account, which allows them to be easily shared online. In fact, they were a major component of our 2017 social media campaign, and they will continue to be used for many years. Moreover, as new videos are produced and added, we are building a living history of our industry, showcasing farmers young and old as they live out their catfish farming lives.

As you watch the videos, we hope you will say of word of thanks to those farmers who were involved in this important undertaking.

### Sports Marketing

In 2014, The Catfish Institute launched the industry’s first major sports marketing campaign with



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television advertising on the newly founded SEC Network. Since that time, opportunities and options for growing our presence in this category have abounded.

In 2017, a prime example is a social media campaign undertaken during the Stanley Cup hockey tournament (of all things!). After learning of the Nashville Predators’ fan tradition of tossing a whole catfish onto the ice prior to each

home game, TCI’s creative gears went into action.

In short order, a digital advertising plan was developed and launched on social media platforms, which were targeted specifically at Predators fans throughout Tennessee and the surrounding region. Although the home team lost the Stanley Cup, the catfish industry was a clear winner, as the resulting fan interaction data was unprecedented.

TCI also expanded its presence at major rodeo events, as U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish sponsored more than a half-dozen of the South’s largest and most prestigious professional rodeos. In-arena graphics, over-air mentions and other special exposure

opportunities successfully drove awareness



*Sports marketing has become a major focus of TCI marketing campaigns.*





TCI distributed 50,000 fans at 10 different SEC football games.

among this all-American audience.

In addition, we continued to capitalize on our core consumers' love of Southeastern Conference football. At 10 different SEC football games this past season, a total of 50,000 handheld fans were custom-made and distributed at the stadium gates. As an added marketing layer, TCI tested new social media targeting technology, which allowed us to deliver special messages directly to fans' phones inside the stadium. We are especially excited about opportunities to expand on this in the coming year!

A new print magazine advertisement was prominently placed in the Southeastern edition of *Lindy's Sports* magazine, a leader in SEC athletics coverage for decades.

And lastly, a television advertising campaign ran from August through the end of the year, keying in on any opportunity to align with news coverage of sporting events—especially SEC football. You will be able to read more about these elements later in this report.

### Collateral Branding

TCI continues to develop new printed collateral pieces each year, providing needful information, and recipes, for promoting our industry.



Outdoor billboards promoted U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish on 24 new digital boards in a dozen markets.



The annual calendar continues to be one of TCI's most sought after collateral pieces.

**The radio ads aired throughout the season on a broad network of stations across Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana and Tennessee.**

The annual Catfish Farmers of the Year "Favorite Recipes" brochure continues to be a major hit among our audience as we seek to connect the food to the farm. It also serves as a point of pride for those who are selected each year for this honor by their state organizations.



A series of 12 short recipe videos is promoted heavily on social media throughout the year.

We also are continually pleased with our annual calendar project. The 2017 edition offered a dozen all-new seasonal variations of catfish dishes that are sure to keep consumers coming back for more!

### National Catfish Month

To celebrate August as National Catfish Month, our marketing and





*TCI's partnerships with TV outlets places U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish in front of tens of millions of viewers nationwide.*

public relations campaign included outreach through our social media platforms; regional radio features by the 2017 Catfish Farmers of the Year; nationally broadcast television segments; and print ads in regional publications.

The radio ads aired throughout the season on a broad network of stations across Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana and Tennessee. These are designed to build industry pride, recognize our farmers and their families, and create awareness among our consumer base.

TCI continued its sponsorship of the Mr. Food Test Kitchen®, a nationally syndicated cooking show. Mr. Food airs daily in more than 130 television markets nationwide and reaches over 5.5 million viewers each day. Two new, nationally televised Mr. Food programs featuring U.S. Catfish aired during the month of August.

The popular Cooking Up Louisiana Treasures television program also produced a special episode for National Catfish Month this year. This syndicated series airs across a network of stations throughout the state of Louisiana, with additional outflow into Arkansas, Mississippi and Texas. The Louisiana Department of Agriculture cosponsors the program, and Commissioner Mike Strain, a longtime catfish industry supporter on both the regional and national level, helps to co-host many of the episodes.

### Social Media

Thanks to carefully targeted outreach and timely posts throughout the year, TCI's Facebook following grew to more than 100,000 fans, along with steady rates of growth occurring on our Twitter and Pinterest pages.

We value the opportunity to interact

directly with the public through these platforms, particularly during National Catfish Month, and look forward to continuing work in these areas.

### Television Campaign

Now completing its fourth consecutive year, TCI's television advertising campaign was bolstered with the creation of three new 30-second ads, one for each of the new Catfish Farmers of the Year. These were edited from the longer formatted "Catfish is Life" series and are receiving glowing reviews from both consumers and the industry alike. The ads air in targeted markets across the South during local nightly news on market-leading stations

The Wrangler Network, the broadcast home of North America's largest rodeos, opened the door to millions of rodeo fans across the continent, as U.S. Catfish continued its major sponsorship in hopes of reaching, perhaps, the nation's most patriotic audience, with our "All-American" marketing messages.

And, as you read earlier, we also maintained our national television presence with the syndicated Mr. Food Test Kitchen® program, as well as with Cooking Up Louisiana Treasures, a statewide television program in Louisiana.

### Outdoor Boards

TCI re-entered the outdoor billboard advertising space in 2017, thanks to the progress of the new, more affordable digital board platform. Digital



*With 4 professional TV ads in rotation across our core consumption area, TCI is reaching into American households like never before.*



*Jeremy Robbins, Townsend Kyser, Chris and Missy McGlawn, Mary Quitman Holmes, Glen Fleming and Roger Barlow serve catfish to visitors at TCI's booth at the 2017 Seafood Expo North America in Boston.*

outdoor boards offer a much more cost-effective option over the old vinyl format, and it allows us to cover a much larger geographic footprint. As such, we maintained a presence throughout the year on 24 boards in 12 different markets, all in impressive, high-traffic locations across our core consumption area.

### **Seafood Expo North America**

TCI is a longtime exhibitor at North America's largest seafood trade show—Seafood Expo North America. The annual show boasts an attendance of more than 20,000 seafood buyers, many of whom visit our booth and taste-test U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish for the first time.

The 2017 Catfish Farmers of the Year were all in attendance this year—Mary Quitman Holmes of Alabama, who also happens to be the industry's first female farmer so honored; Glen Fleming of Arkansas; and our industry's first catfish farming "couple" of the year, Chris and Missy McGlawn of Mississippi.

Our team shared the message of all-



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American quality, freshness and food safety, as well as extreme culinary versatility. As always, we are appreciative of the time and effort donated by our farmers who traveled to Boston to provide first-hand knowledge of the industry, while providing a true show of force for the long-term viability and strength of U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish.

### **Co-Marketing Programs**

Now in its tenth year, the Partnership Program leverages the marketing dollars of TCI's member

processors and state marketing organizations to further promote the U.S. Catfish industry. This program provides reimbursement for 50% of applicable marketing costs—up to a set amount of \$30,000 per processor and \$10,000 per state organization, per calendar year.

These partnership dollars fund a variety of marketing programs such as billboard, television and radio advertisements; collateral materials; website development; and many other special promotions. All funding requests are reviewed by an independent committee to ensure validity and sound use of industry resources.

Another extremely successful co-marketing initiative, the Sales Incentive Program, provides up to \$50,000 per affiliated processor for consumer-directed promotions in restaurant and grocery chains across the nation.

New partnerships with restaurant chains, local catfish houses, grocery store chains and high-end, white tablecloth establishments have opened doors for our processors as they seek





The Insider's Guide to Local Eats in the Jackson Metrc



Southeastern Grocers



TCI funds marketing promotions at grocery stores, restaurants, foodservice distributors and various culinary events throughout the nation each year via its co-marketing programs.





*Top Photo: Industry representatives, along with participants in the annual TCI-CFA Young Farmer Leadership Program, prepare for the annual catfish fry on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. Bottom Photo: While in Washington, the TCI-CFA Young Farmer Leadership team visited with USDA Agriculture Marketing Service officials.*

to drive sales and broaden markets in the face of stiff competition from cheaper imports.

### **Young Farmer Leadership Program**

Now in its seventh year, the Young Farmer Leadership Program, which is co-funded by TCI and Catfish Farmers of America, brings together the next generation of catfish industry leaders for two days of seminars, roundtable discussions and team building.

This year's meetings were held in

Washington, D.C., in concert with the annual industry fish fry. Our group of 28 farmers met not only with their elected officials, but also with American Farm Bureau Federation President Zippy Duval, the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture CEO Barbara Glenn, as well as with the administrations of the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, the USDA Agriculture Marketing Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The connections made through the Young Farmer Leadership Program will serve these young farmers well into the future and equip them for roles as leaders of state catfish organizations, TCI, CFA and other associations in the catfish industry.

### **Mail-Rebate Program**

TCI's mail-in rebate program continued for a third year, thanks to a partnership with R&V Works' Cajun Cookers. This Louisiana-based









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**Several states, including Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee, require restaurants to identify the country of origin of the catfish they serve.**

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decisions made by our board of directors regarding promotions and advertising, as well as allow industry representatives to provide updated statistical information to national and state officials and others as needed.

#### **Public Relations**

Throughout the year, on an as-needed basis, TCI produces and distributes a series of "News Alerts." These informative e-mails provide industry news to not only those in the U.S. catfish industry but also policymakers at the federal level in Washington as well as at the state level; agricultural leaders across the nation; and members of both the U.S. and foreign media.

Many of these news alerts were the basis for news stories that appeared in print or were discussed on radio and television segments nationwide. The benefit of these alerts is better information sharing among catfish



*TCI and the state catfish farmer organizations work to maintain a strong rapport with state legislatures in order to maintain support for laws mandating the labeling of catfish in restaurants.*

industry constituents and better awareness of our issues in the media. With each News Alert comes a new interview opportunity and a new chance to share the story of U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish

#### **Country of Origin Labeling Laws**

Several states, including Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee, require restaurants to identify the country of origin of the catfish they serve.

While these laws are a huge win for consumer food safety, they must be

enforced to be truly effective. With limited staffing for frequent inspections, each state requires our help to have a successful law.

Please be a conscientious consumer. When you are dining at a restaurant, take note of whether catfish, or catfish-like species, are being sold. If they are not properly labeled, please call your state agency, as listed in the accompanying sidebar.

### **Restaurant Labeling Laws in Your State**

Please be a conscientious consumer. When dining at a restaurant, take note of whether catfish, or imported catfish-like species, are being sold. If they are not properly labeled, please contact the appropriate state agency listed below.



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